

Racism in Drug Policies: A Report on United States Legislation

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Abstract : Crack cocaine first appeared on the scene in the form of cocaine freebasing in the late 1970s. Stockbrokers, investment bankers, rock stars, Hollywood elites, and a few pro athletes were regular users of the substance. As criminogenic factors associated with substance abuse began to surface, congress passed new legislation. The laws led to the increase of health coverage insurances and the expansion of hospitals. By the mid-1980s, crack use spread into America's inner cities among impoverished African Americans and Latinos. While substance abuse increased among minority communities, legislation pertaining to substance abuse evolved. The prison industry also expanded the number of cells available. A qualitative approach was taken, drawing from a range secondary sources for contextual analysis. This paper traces out the continued marginalisation and racist undertones towards minorities as perpetuated by certain drug policies. It was discovered that the new legislation on crack was instrumental in the largest incarcerations the United States ever faced. Drug offenders increased in prisons eightfold from 1986 to 2000. The paper concludes that American drug control policies are consistently irrational and ineffective when measured by levels of substance use and abuse. On the contrary, these policies have been successful as agents of social control in maintaining the stratification patterns of racial/ethnic minorities and women. To move beyond prohibition, radical law and policy reform may require a change in narratives on substance use.

Keywords : crack, drug policy, minorities, racism, substance abuse

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